

## Psalm 45 on the Blessed Virgin Mary

In honor of today being the feast day of the Blessed Virgin Mary, according to Anglican tradition, I thought it prudent to share something on this blog about her. This is based on my notes for a brief homily during Evening Prayer today.

*ASIDE: In the Roman calendar, today is specifically the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, and there are other feast days to commemorate her birth, conception, and even her Queenship, though that's a mere Optional Memorial which shows up a week from today (on August 22nd). But classical Anglicanism chopped back all those holy days for liturgical reasons as well as theological, and thus we've got just this one day to commemorate her specifically.*

Mary has many titles, as you've probably noticed. They usually come from biblical typologies.

Quick review: a typology is when basic literal meanings are used to point to additional meanings. An allegory is when a basic literal meaning is *bypassed* to point to a deeper meaning. When Jesus tells a parable, it's allegory – there was never (necessarily) a farmer who scattered seeds all over the darn place, and compared how the crops turned out rocky ground, the path, the fertile ground, and amidst the weeds. No, because it's allegory, the literal point of the parable is *not* about farmer and the crops, but *only* what they represent. Typologies are different; they require a real connection between the plain meaning and the deeper meaning. For example, when people talk about the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham as a picture of the sacrifice of Christ, they're making a typology. An allegory would assert that what happened with Abraham & Isaac is unimportant, or even untrue, and all that matters is the sacrifice of Christ that it foretells. But because it's a typology, the *reality* of the Abraham & Isaac story is what points us to the reality of Christ's sacrifice.

So, as I was saying, many of the descriptions and titles that the Church has applied to Mary over the centuries have come about not by direct biblical suggestion, but through typologies. As Jesus told some of his disciples, the entire Old Testament points to him, and the gospel story. Well, Mary is a major player in the gospel story, being Jesus' mom, and thus we should not be surprised to see her popping up in many of those Old Testament prophecies and typologies.

I just want to explore one title of Mary today: "**the Queen of Heaven**." In recent centuries, some protestants have erroneously used [Jeremiah 44:17](#) to argue that this title turns Mary into an idol. In that passage, "the queen of heaven" is the title of a pagan goddess – probably Asherah – and thus a number of protestants have accused Catholics of repeating that sin of idolatry with Mary. In reality, the title (as far as it is attributed to Mary) comes from quite a different source. It is a basic biblical teaching that Jesus is the promised King from David's line, and as his mother, Mary is therefore Queen. For, in the ancient world, the Queen was not the King's wife, but the King's *mother*. So, Mary as Queen of Heaven implies in no way that she is married to Christ, co-reigns with Christ, or is equal to Christ. It is, one hand, simply a result of her relationship as Jesus' mom, and on the other hand, an acknowledgement of her prominent place within the Church.

The Psalm reading for Evening Prayer on St. Mary's day is Psalm 45, which is a beautiful Psalm depicting Jesus, Mary, and the Church by way of typologies.

## **Jesus in Psalm 45**

The subtitle of this Psalm, depending on which translation you pick up, will note that it's a "love song" or a "song of the beloved one." Knowing that Jesus is God the Father's "well-beloved Son," we've got a pretty good hint that this Psalm is going to contain types of Christ. As one reads through it, can be seen without too much controversy that the first eight verses point to Jesus. He is depicted as a beautiful and glorious king, victorious over all, and reigning over all. Verses 6 & 7 are even quoted in Hebrews 1:8-9 as descriptions of the Son of God, so we can rest assured that the authors of the Bible have given this typology their stamp of approval.

A couple quick side notes might fill out this imagery a bit better. In verse 8 the Psalmist mentions the fragrance of myrrh, aloes, and cassia as coming off of Jesus' garments. The first two are spices used in incense. Incense, in turn, is associated with prayer ascending to God's throne as a pleasing aroma, which I would argue points to Christ's ministry of intercession for us and for all mankind. Cassia, as it turns out, was also associated with ancient medicines, so it could well be a picture of Christ's healing power and work in the redemption of creation. Neat stuff!

## **Mary in Psalm 45**

The second half of the Psalm, verses 9-17, describe a type of Mary. Verse 9 is a bit of a literary hinge: it is still address the King (Jesus), but describes his Queen (Mary). Verse 10 then turns to that Queen and addresses her as "Daughter." Remembering that in this ancient setting, the Queen is the mother of the King, it makes sense for her to be both Queen and Daughter, because she, like everyone else, is a subject of the King. Mary is Jesus' mother, and that garners her a pretty glorious title – Queen – but she still looks to Jesus as her Savior; she is a child of God just like the rest of us.

But her motherhood doesn't stop at her motherhood of Jesus, and this can be seen in little hints throughout this Psalm.

## **The Church in Psalm 45**

There are other characters in Psalm 45 beside the King and the Queen. In verse 5, "the peoples" and "enemies" alike fall under the King's reign. This seems to suggest a multi-national kingdom over which Jesus reigns. Verses 9 and 12 confirm this by mentioning "daughters of kings" and "daughters of Tyre" as coming to the Queen to join her service. Tyre was a neighboring Gentile kingdom of Israel which seemed to get along with Israel just fine for most of their history. Thus, a number of Psalms use Tyre as a representative for Gentiles coming to Israel to worship God.

But what's interesting is that in verses 9 & 12 the peoples come into association with Mary also, not just under the King's banner. This is made even more explicit in verses 14 & 16. Verse 14 depicts "virgin companions" of the Queen in procession behind her as they approach the King. This is not a wedding procession remember – the Queen is the King's mom, not wife (hence also why the Queen is not a type of the Church, the Bride of Christ). Rather, this is a procession of fealty, or celebration over a recent victory, or even the King's coronation ceremony. Verse 16 brings in a different angle – the Queen's "sons" who will become princes to reign over the earth. This is a picture of us fulfilling the human mandate to rule over creation under God's

kingship. While verse 14 puts us in a procession of celebration more or less led by Mary, verse 16 puts us in a position of sonship to Mary. Behold your mother, Mary, the “mother of the faithful.”

Now that’s another title with another host of meanings to it, one of which I’ve hinted at before in [a sermon about Baptism](#). So I won’t get into it now.

What can we appreciate from this title of Mary as Queen of Heaven? Rightly understood, it gives us a way of exalting her within the Church, explaining her relationship “over” us, while yet maintaining her relationship under Christ. Modern and medieval definitions of Queenship can trip us up if we’re not careful, but this Church tradition is fundamentally Jewish in its worldview; it’s *not* a Greek accretion that revisionists like to complain about in the Early Church.